

## **Changing Landscapes: Supporting System Capacity Building during a Pandemic**

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### **Abstract**

During the best of times capacity building that supports system enhancement is complex and multi-faceted. In the current pandemic new challenges exist. With this in mind, it is still important to remember that “The most powerful way that school leaders can make a difference to the learning of their students is by promoting and participating in the professional learning and development of their teachers” (Robinson, 2011, p.104). Building capacity is best done as a collaborative process that builds instructional programme coherence, focusses teacher practice on student improvement, including meaningful content and processes, and provides multiple opportunities to learn (Robinson, 2011). This creates some obvious challenges during a pandemic with lock downs and school closures. With the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic, the landscape in which capacity building occurs has changed and there is heavy reliance on technology and virtual landscapes for conducting the work. The methodology used in two capacity building initiatives is the focus of this study. The implications of those changes are important to understand as they may provide insight to inform how to support future challenges. A common approach to assist with educational change in developing countries is to engage external consultants to provide technical expertise and guidance. MindBloom Consulting an organisation which specializes in education capacity building was engaged to support a program to prepare students for their return to school when health restrictions permitted. One initiative was development of an educational research framework in 2020 in Guyana for using diagnostic assessment to inform instructional planning and another initiative in 2021 in Saint Lucia supported the enhanced use of continuous school improvement processes to improve student learning. Maintaining the integrity of key features of the MindBloom methodology which ensures that change is culturally appropriate, globally significant, practical and possible in the organisational setting were considered paramount. However, because of the pandemic, adaptations and modifications were necessary resulting in a greater reliance on technology. The model adopted in both cases was to provide professional development to leaders within the respective country and facilitate their work in providing similar professional development for others. Based on research and previous project outcomes this “train the trainers” approach was used and intended to instill confidence in education leaders, enables them to undertake and lead capacity development and extends the knowledge transfer, enhancing impact and sustainability.

Questions guiding the analysis include:

- How did the identification of needs and vision frame capacity building?
- How was two-way communication planned for and implemented?
- What steps were taken to ensure local educational leaders were engaged to support providing sustainable solutions?
- How were implementation “bridges” to effect change constructed?
- How did job-embedded professional development occur?
- How were virtual platforms used?
- How was ongoing monitoring and evaluation integrated into decision making?

The paper concludes with lesson learned about capacity building methodology to offer insight into preparation for disaster risk reduction in the future and how technology enabled capacity building might be planned for and delivered.

**Keywords:** Capacity building, educational development, Covid-19 accommodations